

AETC News Clips



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Express-News: Military

Pentagon keeping names of its fighters secret

By Sig Christenson

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In past wars, Americans were treated to a parade of heroes famed for their death-defying deeds, but the specter of terrorism has changed all that.

Under a Pentagon policy that took effect Sunday, pilots, ground troops and even crews flying humanitarian missions aren't being identified.

The troops now go by call signs or nicknames, their deeds destined for obscurity at least until America's war against terror ends.

"This is not a fight against conventional armies, navies and air forces," the Pentagon's top spokesman, Rear Adm. Craig Quigley, explained Wednesday. "This is a fight against terrorists who have shown utterly no reluctance to killing innocent people.

"So if there's the slightest chance that we're going to put either service members or their families at risk by revealing their last names, we're not going to do it."

The policy was instituted as the United States began attacking Taliban positions in Afghanistan this week. It's similar to an edict issued in 1999 by Gen. Wesley Clark, then supreme allied commander of NATO, during the 78-day Kosovo air war.

Pilots, aircrews, soldiers, sailors and Marines in the Afghan theater of operations are affected by the policy. Quigley said military personnel elsewhere could be identified, if they wish.

But there are apparent inconsistencies in the new policy.

In one Associated Press photo taken Wednesday, an F-14 crewman gives a thumbs-up sign after landing on the USS Enterprise. His name and call sign, "T-Bone," are prominently stenciled on the fuselage.

Quigley called the practice of painting names on planes "a big morale booster" for aircrews that would continue despite the new policy.

Express News

PAGE 8A

DATE 11 Oct 01

The Navy and Air Force, moreover, recently have allowed news organizations such as ABC's "Nightline" to videotape and photograph pilots and crews.

That prompted Cato Institute defense expert Ivan Eland to wonder if the military isn't exposing families to possible terrorist attacks.

"There may be a logic to it, but I don't see it now," he said.

While concern over terror reprisals has fueled the policy, a Bush administration-led tightening of information has been under way since Sept. 11.

The Environmental Protection Agency and the Transportation Department, among others, have shut down certain pages on their Web sites or removed potentially sensitive information.

The evolution of Defense Department policy on identifying pilots and other troops is a clear departure from past practices. Former Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said Clark ordered the removal of names from aircraft when families were harassed after their relatives appeared on television during the Kosovo conflict.

Through most of the last century, however, the government actively promoted its war heroes on the homefront to boost public morale and help sell war bonds.

During World War I, World War II and the Korean War, a great deal of attention was paid to fliers who have shot down five or more planes, said San Antonio historian T.R. Fehrenbach. A stronger emphasis in recent years on teamwork, rather than individual deeds, makes sense, is safer and avoids "an element of exploitation," he said.

"I think in this circumstance where we have a high risk that there are terrorist operatives in the United States that it certainly makes sense," former Air Force Secretary F. Whitten Peters said of the new policy.

Famed Flying Tigers ace David Lee "Tex" Hill, 86, agreed.

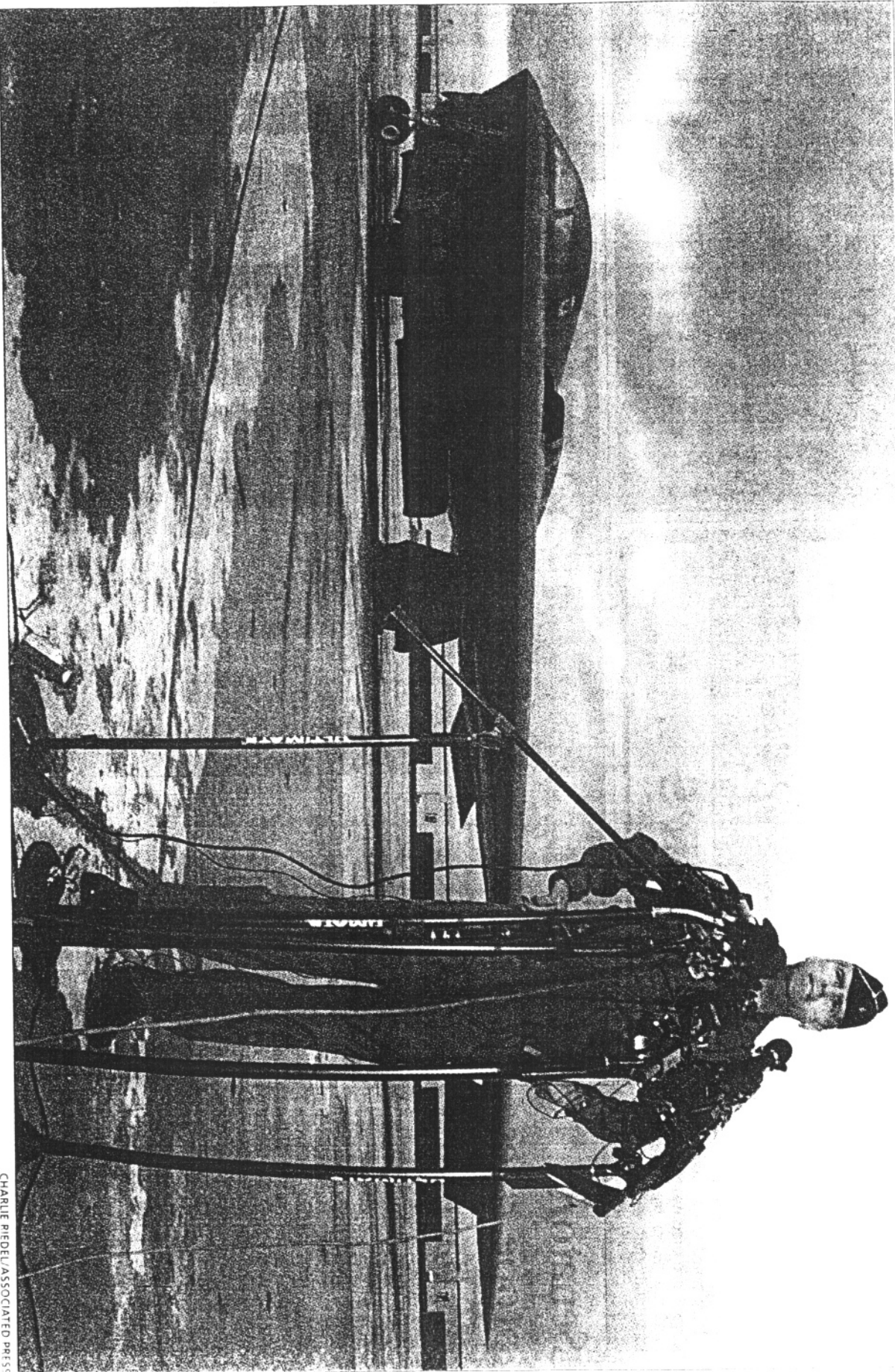
"I think you're going to see some attacks on individuals, military people or just Americans in general," predicted Hill, a San Antonian who scored 181/4 kills in World War II and was the inspiration for John Wayne's character in the 1942 film "The Flying Tigers."

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10/11/2001

2

YOU USE IT WHEN YOU WANT THE EARTH TO SHAKE. . . .
DEFENSE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL



CHARLIE FIEDUL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Standing in front of a B-2 stealth, Brig. Gen. Tony Przybylski of the 509th Bomb Wing at Whiteman AFB talks about the bomber's use in action. The B-2 warplanes

traveled 44 hours from Missouri to drop bombs on targets in Afghanistan, the longest nonstop air combat mission in history, Przybylski said.



Express News

PAGE 6A

DATE 11 Oct 01

3

Jet sounds are consoling

To the editor:

I first would like to say that I am the daughter of an Air Force/Korean War veteran and I am very proud of the 22 years my father served to protect our freedom and the freedom of other democratic societies. I believe strongly in the protection that the men and women of the Armed Forces provide us.

For many years the members of the West Valley community have resisted Luke Air Force Base. They have complained of the noise of the training procedures and the extra traffic the airmen cause by commuting to their jobs every day. I would like to say thank you to Luke Air Force Base service people and civil service staff.

In the still, eerie calmness of the skies, Sept. 11 because there were no planes flying over the West Valley, I found it difficult to sleep. Lying in my bed my mind was racing, thinking about the horrific, cowardly happenings of Sept. 11, 2001. It was so quiet I could think of nothing else. I couldn't even

think about sleeping because of the allegations and rumors that other terrorist attacks may progress to the western United States including Hoover Dam and the Palo Verde Nuclear Plant. I couldn't sleep until I heard the consoling sounds of F-16 jets flying over my neighborhood.

So, this letter is to say "thank you." Thank you to the trained, expert pilots that are trained at Luke Air Force Base. Thank you to all the support staff that they have to make it possible for them to fly, from mechanics to clerical workers. Thank you for letting me sleep September 11, 2001 and for every day before this horrific attack.

It is about time that the West Valley embraces these airmen and the civil service workers. It is time for us to come together and not be divided. It is time we should be thankful for the work that these people do and to recognize that, because of them, we can sleep at night.

Bethann Smith
Avondale

West Valley View

3 Oct 01

Pg. A9

4